

Anti-Americanism in Australia

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Les Heathcote once told me that the three-step trajectory of his university education had been ideal: an undergraduate degree in England, a Masters degree in the United States, and a Ph.D. in Australia. The American component was rarely acknowledged in the career that followed, although it was at Nebraska where Leslie Hewes and James C. Malin turned his thoughts towards the pastoral frontier. Hence an American contribution to this memorial volume.

Anti-Americanism was not one of Les's preferred themes. Indeed, the compassionate Les was congenitally indisposed to speak damningly of anything, or anybody. He was, however, an early bloom in the geographical florescence of environmental perception. He saw natural hazards in the same way that many Australians see the United States. That's my second excuse for writing about anti-Americanism – the perception of one country by the citizens of another.

Viewing Other Nations. One diagram that Les used in depicting what affected perception showed a series of lenses through which the perception of an environment was filtered and conditioned by the observer. When Australians look at the United States, all they can see is a biased view of an amorphous entity – like looking at one's spouse. We are all at 1 Corinthians 13, looking through our own glasses darkly. Yet degrees of consensus are forced upon us when one sovereign nation undertakes to interact with another, through trade, migration, defence, tourism, culture, and much else.

Some perceptions of other countries are more consequential than others. What happens if we fail to anticipate the consequences of invading Iraq, or exporting uranium to Iran, or keeping foreign bananas out of Australia? Lives, security, and a cheap breakfast are at stake. We brush aside lesser issues. Who cares that 80 percent of the movies we see originate in California, that much of our popular music comes from across the Pacific, and that Australians travel abroad on aircraft manufactured elsewhere? Some do care, it is true, but they don't demonstrate outside Woolworths or Parliament House.

Bear in mind, too, that not all Australian reactions to the USA are negative, little though we read of pro-Americanism. Nonetheless, from the light-hearted Elvis Festivals in Parkes, NSW, to the sober-serious American Australian Association founded in 1948 by Sir Keith Murdock, advocacy groups and fan clubs abound. Users of Facebook, Twitter, Google, Amazon or Apple products rarely begrudge their American originators, or even acknowledge them.

My take on the anti-Americanism expressed by Australians has a deliberately narrow base. Since Les Heathcote wrote for thinking geographers, not blogging hotheads, so shall I. My data have been drawn from what has appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* between June 2010 and December 2011. Reporters, columnists, letter-writers, editors, and other contributors have supplied me with 341 documents. They provide

an informed, diverse, shifting, contentious, comprehensive, but still partial view of the United States – after surviving editorial scrutiny, scrubbed free of slander and treason. Moreover, those who pen and publish a pointed critique usually want to influence influential readers. By framing issues as problems inviting solutions, they invite rebukes from the better informed. Australians do heap unalloyed abuse and unfocused hate on the United States, but rarely in the respectful *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Bones of Contention. Which issues concern these mostly civil and thoughtful contributors? Table 1 lists, classifies, and ranks twenty-two broad-gauge issues. They elicited different degrees of concern. Domestic politics and foreign affairs account for almost a quarter of what was published. What is Congress up to now, we ask? For Australians, decisions from Washington overshadow those from Wall Street, or Whitehall. Serious newspapers are the preferred soapboxes for political pundits, opinion-makers, social critics, misanthropes, and ratbags. Their cries drown out most others.

Next in the rankings are concerns about American aggression. Such categories as defence, war, censorship, law, and guns are touchy flashpoints for Australians. So is America's 'cultural invasion,' especially when conveyed in American English or by the media empires (often equated with Hollywood). Of middling concern to Australians are religious, environmental, and consumer issues. Least often denounced are sport, health, business, entertainment, and good old gung-ho patriotism.

Yet these categories in Table 1 hardly cover the whole contentious American waterfront. Understandably enough, Americans themselves are more fraught about many internal conflicts that simply pass Australians by. A case in point would be the recent burial anomalies in Arlington National Cemetery, which only outraged Americans. Many American matters that are covered routinely by such American outlets as *Time* magazine and the PBS NewsHour are seldom ventilated in the Australian press. These would include racism, ethnicity, immigration, science, design, building, energy, tourism, the humanities, psychology, youth, or such divisive issues as abortion, gay rights, creationism, and climate change. We anguish over all these matters when they erupt in Australia, but seldom when they fester in the United States. Yet both nations have had comparable experiences with a Hurricane Katrina or the Queensland floods, refugee boats from Asia or illegal border crossings by Mexicans. A curtain of national privacy is also drawn around certain domestic events, like the funeral of a president or the celebration of Anzac Day.

Caution. All the following examples of anti-Americanism are drawn from my sources. They are not necessarily my own opinions. These have been relegated to my concluding afterthoughts. Sources are quoted verbatim, warts and all, without recourse to FactCheck.

Politics. This is the primary source of anti-Americanism. Australians often recoil from what they see as the excesses and peculiarities of American domestic politics. They liken American political conventions to 'circuses' with 'freak parades' and 'idiot queen pageants.' They deplore how limited American government oversight is,

Table 1: Anti-American issues

Issues	Occurrences	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Politics (domestic)	46	13.49	13.49
Diplomacy foreign)	36	10.56	24.05
Defence	30	8.80	32.85
Culture	26	7.62	40.47
Law	19	5.57	46.04
Decline	18	5.28	51.31
Censorship	17	4.99	56.31
Language	17	4.99	61.30
War	16	4.69	65.98
Media	14	4.11	70.10
Education	13	3.81	73.91
Guns	13	3.81	77.72
Environment	11	3.23	80.94
Products	11	3.23	84.18
Religion	11	3.23	87.41
Business	9	2.64	90.05
Entertainment	7	2.05	92.10
Economy	6	1.76	93.86
Patriotism	6	1.76	95.62
Health	5	1.47	97.09
Philanthropy	5	1.47	98.56
Sport	5	1.47	100.00
All issues	341	100.00	

how lax their regulations (especially of commerce, banking, and the environment), how inward looking, crisis-weary, paralytic, and recalcitrant their Congress has become. They deplore the right wing zealots, the Tea Party ‘nutters’ (the ‘light-weight brigade’), the ‘greed is good’ Reaganites, the ‘dunderheaded buffoons’ of the GOP whose ‘outright negativity’ flirts with anarchy. Many American politicians behave like ‘spoiled brats,’ including the ‘guilty liberals,’ who are just as morally bankrupt and equally responsible for partisan polarisation. Yet many Australians lament America’s loss of optimism and self-confidence, and the dismantling of its ‘political class.’ Australians are bewildered by the American disdain for welfare and health entitlements, and the knee-jerk dismissal of big government as ‘creeping socialism,’

or worse. Few Australians rant like Americans that ‘government is the problem.’ Some recoil from the choice of candidates according to their religious stance on abortion or gay marriage. They reject the cult of celebrity that anoints a Reagan or a Schwarzenegger but disqualifies Joe Blow. They shudder at the rorting of electoral boundaries, such as the outrageous ‘gerrymandered gerrymanders’ of Texas. They recoil from polls where the winner-takes-all, from lobbyists who buy elections, from back-room advocacy organizations that covertly set the political agenda, and from third-party think tanks that hone and orchestrate negative campaign advertising. Despite Rupert Murdoch’s nativity, his Fox News is widely distrusted in Australia, with its ‘hordes of bogan nongs.’ Others are incredulous at the corruption, logrolling, special ‘earmarks’ (like the ‘bridge to nowhere’), and the surfeit of special concessions extracted for West Virginia by the late Senator Robert C. Byrd.

Australians hate the way that money buys influence and endorses candidates in the United States. It cuts across the egalitarian Australian grain to witness this celebration of wealth and power by an odious, self-serving oligarchy. So does the local rent-a-crowd that populates the rallies and provides an echo chamber for favoured candidates. It disgusts many Australians to see ‘welfare queens’ and ‘food-stamp handouts’ so roundly condemned by stingy voters who avert their eyes from the down-and-out.

Australians often believe their parliamentary democracy is superior to the American model. They favour not voting for appointed officials, including judges. They resoundingly retain compulsory voting – an unthinkable abomination to most Americans. They feel more ‘grown up’ and politically savvy, more ready to overlook the ‘personal peccadillos’ of politicians. They bask in having a simpler system of government where, for example, a federal election campaign lasts only thirty days and costs less than a single Senate race in California. Most Australians embrace their more restrained political culture and shudder at America’s effusive uproar. They are aghast at the ‘sheer ignorance’ of Americans who reject Darwinian evolution and climate change, while electing oafs whose loathing for science halts medical research.

Diplomacy & Foreign Affairs. Much as they dislike and distrust domestic politics in the United States, many Australians are even more hostile to US foreign policy. They ask why the events of September 11, 2001 should lock the entire Western world into retribution mode. Why should military force so abruptly bypass diplomacy? Why should unilateral actions so often precede (and preclude) multilateral negotiations? What degree of hubris, what arrogance, what aggression, what greed, what self-aggrandisement, what megalomania, what paranoia, what constant sabre-rattling can possibly vindicate US foreign policy? As the ‘world’s enforcer,’ the United States has imposed its ‘warped values’ upon other sovereign nations, often ‘violating their sanctity.’ What persuades both Democratic and Republican leaders that the United States has both ‘the right and the responsibility’ to ‘patrol every boundary’ and ‘police every country?’ American missionaries for democracy should not meddle with foreign cultures if they lack the ‘capacity to engineer change.’ US support for ‘military dictatorships’ has merely imperilled regional stability while boosting sales of American arms. One detractor described the United States as the ‘most two-faced, hypocritical, untrustworthy country on Earth.’ Despite such invective, Peter Beinart

wants America to remain a 'missionary nation, with an enduring desire to repair and redeem the world.'

Many Australian citizens see their country tethered by treaties to a senile ally, to a 'dying empire,' tired and angry at its own increasing loss of stature and credibility. The Pax Americana is on the wane, leaving Australia boiling all by itself in an Asian cauldron. What became of our faded security guarantor? How many 'coalitions of the willing' are needed to pay Australia's insurance premiums? Is there only one provider selling national insurance? Many argue instead for Australia's armed neutrality, for keeping its armies solely for national defence, for becoming a 'middle power' pursuing an independent foreign policy or pragmatically forming a 'loose coalition' with other middle powers.

Australians of every political stripe deeply resent the obsequiousness shown to the United States by every Australian government since World War II. They hated the grovelling of Prime Minister Harold Holt to President Lyndon B. Johnson ('all the way with LBJ'), and when Prime Minister Howard unctuously played the 'bootscooting Deputy Sheriff swearing his habitually lying love for his Unca Dubya.' Prime Minister Gillard, her former colleague Mark Latham sneered, had also 'joined the conga line.' Washington always knows best. That was the mantra. Australians likened themselves to Canadians, forever playing Robin to America's Batman. They were like the cowed British lapdog – America's poodle rolling over to get its tummy tickled. Polite critics condemned all this as 'political cowardice' and 'nationally-degrading' sycophancy. More impudent critics derisively denounced Australia's 'never-ending supply of Yankee arse-lickers.' The payback for deference, they said, was nothing more than being 'fleeced, conned, and exploited.' Scandinavian nations, by contrast, remain resolutely independent states between the 'massive paws of the Russian bear,' whereas Australia cowers in the American shadow. Such sycophancy, many Australians grumbled, has earned their country only ridicule and contempt from its neighbours. While heading its Department of Foreign Affairs, Alan Renouf termed Australia 'the Frightened Country.'

Australian indignation has been targeted specifically at the US treatment of Mamdouh Habib and David Hicks, who were detained at Guantanamo Bay for alleged terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Equally high dudgeon has been aroused by the US pursuit of Julian Assange, whose Wikileaks disgorged classified documents and so incensed the US Department of State. Whatever the charges against them, these three Australians have become folk heroes for many of their compatriots. They became the moral counterparts of Ned Kelly (1855–80), whose larrikin contempt for the law still outshines his murdering of policemen. All three detainees thumbed their noses at the political establishment. Australians were outraged by calls to assassinate Assange from the Congressional leaders of a country evidently willing to execute its whistle-blowers. Recalling how the United States had denied India's request to extradite the chief executive of Union Carbide, after its Bhopal factory exploded in 1984, Assange's supporters cried foul. They called it rank, self-serving hypocrisy. For many Australians, the American war on terror had also intensified recourse to torture (while disingenuously endorsing its worldwide elimination), illegal kidnappings ('extraordinary rendition' of suspects to third

countries), detention without trial ('preventive detention'), and summary executions (like those of Osama bin Laden and the 'radical' Muslim cleric Anwar al-Aulaqi).

Asia and the Middle East are the two regions where US intervention most unsettles Australians. China is widely accepted as Australia's main engine of future growth, its economic benefactor. It is also feared as a rising global hegemon, an emerging arbiter in world affairs. It seems poised to invest heavily in Australia's infrastructure, and may succeed in positioning Hong Kong as the future London or New York of Asia. Malcolm Turnbull, the former Liberal Party leader, declared that China has systematically 'hollowed out' the core of the American economy, draining its manufacturing sector and piling up its national debt. That being the case, Australian politicians now pause before annoying or confronting China 'on the coat-tails of a failed superpower.' For them, there is a touchy choice between remaining 'America's bitch' or becoming 'China's whore.' The United States is the softer target, at least for the nonce.

Anti-Americanism surfaces in Australia when the United States launches new military initiatives to confront and contain China, whose Asian neighbours believe it imperative to keep open the sea-lanes through the South China Sea. When Richard Armitage of the US State Department told Australians 'we'd expect you to be there' if a US-China conflict broke out over Taiwan, his friends in Canberra asked 'are you people nuts?'

Anti-Americanism bristled most fiercely when US Marines chose Darwin as their new base, further exposing the Australian mainland as a terrorist target. There were ramifications galore. Armed and nuclear-powered vessels might become sitting ducks in Australian ports. Would the 'arsenal of democracy' store cluster bombs in Darwin? Will American troops stationed in Australia be immune from prosecution under Australian law? The 2009 sexual assaults by US soldiers in Japan cast a long shadow southwards. Australians also worry that the 'Brisbane event' of 1942 may be repeated. That was when punitive resentments were exacted on brutal US military policemen, under the influence of 'cigarettes and whiskey and wild, wild women.' If US Marines can set up shop in Darwin, shouldn't an Australian military base be established at Pearl Harbor?

American support for 'authoritarian regimes' around the world has long outraged left-leaning Australians, especially dictatorships in the Middle East. An obstructionist Congress, they say, had blocked peace initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians while derailing the latter's hopes for statehood. To many Australians, the influence of American Jewish organizations seems 'unique and sinister.' The 'puerile delusions' that produced the Iraq campaign escalated into a 'grand folly,' damaging the US capacity to maintain global safety and stability. Australians had little sympathy for Karl Rove, George W. Bush's adviser, who tried to paint him as the 'war president' of the invincible 'crusaders.' In her memoirs, even Condoleezza Rice (Bush's Secretary of State) conceded that pursuing stability at the expense of democracy for 60 years had ultimately achieved neither. Nor had bountifully bankrolling Egypt and Israel succeeded in delivering the road map to Middle Eastern peace.

Australians scoffed at the case for deploying their troops in Afghanistan in the dubious hope that oil pipelines from Turkmenistan – to benefit other countries – could evade the ‘unco-operative’ Taliban. Cynics recalled how Persia’s Prime Minister Mosaddegh had been deposed in 1953 by the British and Americans (via MI6 and the CIA) when he nationalized the oil industries. In politically-corrupt Afghanistan, why fight for ‘freedom and democracy’ in a ‘pointless war that has no end in sight?’ Our lads, they say, are merely cannon fodder in a vain quest for ‘truth, justice, and the American way.’ Not the Australian way. They compare Karzai’s Afghanistan with the propped-up regime in South Vietnam, for which Australian troops also answered the American call. They cringe at how that became the first of three demoralizing American defeats on the battlefield. Who can love a three-time loser?

Defence and War. Some say Australia no longer needs a ‘protector.’ It faces ‘no credible external threat’ and should scale back its defences accordingly. Since China has never waged a foreign war, as some assert, the United States should withdraw from the Asia-Pacific region. Former Prime Minister Howard recently claimed that Americans have now ‘lost their fear of further terrorist attacks.’ If so, they could also withdraw their forces from the Middle East.

A particularly blunt critique of US wars comes from Dr Gideon Polya, a biochemist at La Trobe University. He asserts that ‘lackey countries like Australia’ have been involved in all the US Asian wars since the 1950s. These have produced 26 million deaths in seven countries, if ‘violent deaths’ and those caused by ‘war-imposed deprivation’ are combined. What Polya calls ‘avoidable deaths’ caused by America’s ‘loss of values’ now total 82 million, compared with the forty million attributable to Nazi Germany. He accuses the United States of having invaded ‘over 32 countries since 1945’ (excluding Germany and Japan). The US alliance has also created ‘about 20 million Muslim refugees’ and brought about three thousand Australian deaths from ‘opiate drug-related causes.’ He further claims that two million children under five were killed in Iraq between 1990 and 2011 through ‘Australia and US Alliance activities,’ with another 2.6 million such deaths in Afghanistan (2001–11). The major victims of these ‘high technology wars’ have been women and children. Although Polya’s numerous faultfinders paint him as a political extremist infected with hyperbole, his diatribe does capture the revulsion felt by many Australians over America’s wars.

Other Australians were dismayed by other episodes in these wars: the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse, the black-marketeering by American mercenaries in Baghdad, the ‘immoral and unjust use’ of unpiloted aircraft (drones), the ‘lame ex-post-facto justifications’ for invading Iraq, and the escalation of terrorism following US intervention. They scoff at how easily ‘opposing warlords’ are scamming US taxpayers. They ask why the United States now has more military bases around the world than ever before, and more Western troops in the Middle East than during the Crusades. Why must the United States spend more on defence than the rest of the world combined? What commercial cronyism prompts US diplomats to dissuade the Australian government from awarding defence contracts to Australian firms? In exchange for Australian troops and defence facilities, shouldn’t the United States provide its deputy sheriff with all essential military hardware at next to no cost?

Law, Censorship, and Guns. Politics, diplomacy, war, and defence: all four are framed by US law, restrained by censorship, and coerced by the gun lobby. Certain Australians bristle at how these constraints are levied. They admonish the United States for ignoring the Geneva Conventions. It has 'trashed' the laws of war, penetrated and bombed a fragile sovereign nation (its supposed ally, the nuclear-armed Pakistan), and assassinated one of its own citizens without trial. It detained Australians at Guantanamo Bay, denied them their habeas corpus protections, and subjected them to a kangaroo court. It was a 'sinister farce' to accuse Hicks and Mabib of breaking such 'retrospective laws' as 'conspiracy' and 'material support for terrorism.' Even Osama bin Laden was denied the 'squalid circus' of a trial that Saddam Hussein obtained. Americans displayed a sickening hatred and barbaric vengeance at bin Laden's execution, flaunting all the 'joy of the munchkins' when the 'Wicked Witch of the East' was crushed.

The US contempt for international law is notorious, its critics bellow. They cite its reluctance to ratify convention after convention – on the law of the sea, on the rights of the child, discrimination against women, international biodiversity, crimes against humanity and genocide (in the International Criminal Court), landmines and cluster munitions, and the Kyoto climate protocol. They chide the United States for letting its UN funding obligations slide into arrears for almost twenty-five years.

US domestic legal practice also comes under fire. During Rick Perry's term as Governor, Texas executed 234 felons. Half the world's nations (including Australia) have now banned capital punishment and pour scorn on the laggards from their lofty moral pulpit. Australians also question the need for their own bill of rights, considering what little America's did for African-Americans before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. They question whether relentless litigation or awarding hefty punitive damages made a skerrick of difference to the behaviour of BP or Goldman Sachs. Such frenzied, robotically litigious people! The United States, its critics say, is hardly the world leader in occupational health and safety, or risk-averse business practice. Justice Michael Kirby, now retired from the High Court of Australia, belittled the US Supreme Court nomination and confirmation process as 'media-driven' and 'entertainment-driven.'

Since September 11, 2001, the United States has turned into an 'over-vigilant' scaredy-cat. Its 'emergency mindset' has become the 'new norm.' So some Australians allege. They recoil from the 'largest eavesdropping operations in the world,' where the US Department of Commerce appoints itself as the 'internet sheriff' responsible for 'universal' digital IDs. Detractors abhor the internet filters with their secret black books, the 'No Fly' lists that effectively place citizens under house arrest, the 'culture of secrecy,' the mandatory finger-printing and biometric photography. One traveller protested that the 'byzantine' US visa application procedures make you 'feel like a criminal.' Must the United States be so unwelcoming? Must it add \$9 to postage from Australia just to cover security-screening requirements?

The perceived curtailment of free speech also bothers many Australians. America's civil liberties, they say, are being lost. The Wikileaks disclosures cut right to the Australian marrow. Julian Assange, after all, was a Queenslander. His compatriots

were aghast when credit card companies blocked their payments to Wikileaks. This is a bully's 'totalitarian assault,' they cried, 'on our freedom to choose how we spend our money.' Look where 'unflattering remarks' got General McChrystal. Look at the insider outing of the former CIA operative Valerie Plame Wilson. How hypocritical that a 'rogue state' like the United States could call Wikileaks a 'criminal enterprise.' It was Secretary of State Clinton who should be behind bars, for authorizing her agents to spy on senior UN officials.

Australians habitually express their indignation and incomprehension at the American addiction to guns. They point out that the United States has a population 14 times that of Australia, but its gun deaths are 104 times more common and its gun homicides 294 times greater. BETTAGETTAGUN, as the license plates proclaim. They duck their heads when Sarah Palin exhorts her entourage not to retreat, but to re-load. Many are horrified by campus shootings, sales of weapons across the counter at K-Mart, banks that gift guns to new customers, young shooters buying five weapons at a time, concealed firearms in public places, and armed hunters in National Parks. Many ascribe their fear of visiting the United States to the entrenched gun lobby, whose influence is caricatured in Figure 1.

Cultural Imperialism. Space remains for only a spotty summary of other Australian examples of anti-Americanism. 'Cultural imperialism' is possibly the best umbrella heading. Although ten thousand Americanisms have infiltrated the Australian language, xenophobic purists still reject such terms as drugstore, mailbox, airplane, wildfire, AWOL, Ground Zero (in lower Manhattan), bathroom (for toilet), gotten, and fall (the season). They order Microsoft to abandon 'US English.' They exhort mobile phone users to quit 'txtspeak,' and tell Tinseltown to stop butchering the Aussie accent. Others breathe a sigh of relief that Jerry Springer works elsewhere, that Oprah Winfrey didn't stay for long, that Kerry O'Brien outclasses every pundit on American TV, that 'imported has-beens' take their un-Australian 'Hollywood drivel' back home, and that a remote button can despatch those dreadful 'glorified soap operas.'

Certain Anglo-Australians cannot abide Halloween, nor appreciate Thanksgiving. Some cannot endure hands being placed over hearts on Anzac Day, nor condone Australian cricketers wearing baseball caps, nor stomach all those unmerited American service medals and tacky ribbons. Some cannot bring themselves to say 'Happy Holidays' at Christmas. They sneer at Americans being stuck with miles and Fahrenheit, who seldom venture outside the 'cossetted safety' of their own borders, and whose literature is too 'insular, ignorant, and untranslated' to deserve a Nobel Prize. Alexis de Tocqueville noted their 'perpetual utterance of self-applause' as early as 1835, which humours some Australians.

Then there are those who hate the United States because it is in decline, or could do better. How threadbare the security blanket is getting. Amidst mounting unease, they blame its Congress for becoming dysfunctional and precipitating a national identity crisis. They condemn the military-industrial complex (as Eisenhower warned) for skewing the American economy, with its worldwide weapons sales. They are appalled by the numbers being incarcerated. They wince at the 'grotesqueries' and 'mindless

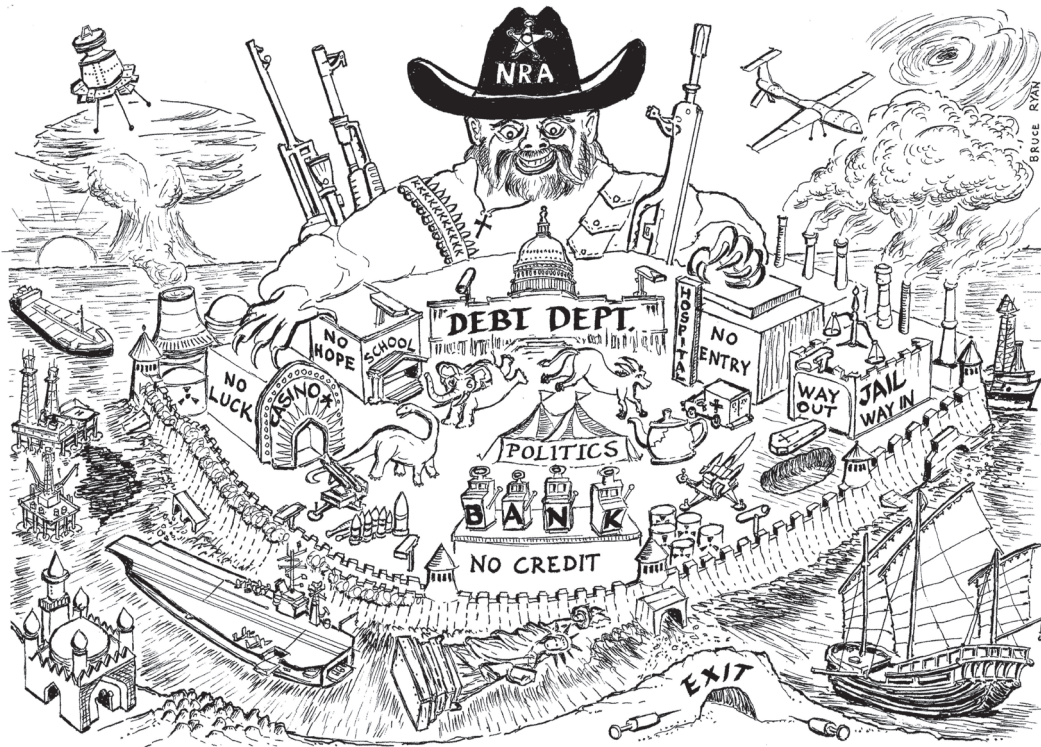


Figure 1: The anti-American landscape

boosterism' of the Tea Party, which they find too 'aggressively Christian.' They fear for the future of the West if US science and engineering slip even lower in the rankings. They wish that Americans would repay their massive national debt, alleviate their poverty and unemployment, salvage their home mortgages, resolve their Middle Eastern woes, and save their unregulated markets from 'financial Armageddon.' Australians agonise when Niall Ferguson forewarns them that the end of empires is usually abrupt, and cautions 'those that rely on them need to be ready.'

Afterthoughts. Australians fall short of denouncing all things American, but they do criticize a lot of what they perceive across the Pacific. Anti-Americanism has become one grand feast where too many cooks have soured the broth. During the past three years, more and more chefs have brought their cutters into this kitchen: from Pakistan, Iran, other Islamic countries, Venezuela, the political left wing, and France – ostensibly the historic source of anti-Americanism.

On the whole, the most trenchant anti-Americanism comes from those who are least able to influence events. Just as impotent Islamists blow themselves up in despair, ineffectual Australians fall back on verbal fireworks and vulgarity. Much anti-Americanism expresses itself in 'paroxysms of moral outrage' from a limited perspective. It dismisses contrary views out of hand, ignoring complexities and spurning compromises. Mockers of 9/11 were 'amused' to see 'an economic titan temporarily knocked off its axis and brought to its knees in shock.' Such perversity

turns jihadists into comic book combatants who spill only virtual blood.

Even so, many different kinds and degrees of animosity are on display in the 341 documents considered here. Some commentators verge on indifference, especially as to context. Some rebukes are measured and informed. Others range from annoyance to anger, dismay, condemnation, fury or blood-curdling outrage – like a declension into incivility. Comments may be superficial, polite, partisan, irate, or patronising. Some convey regret, resentment, jealousy, or paranoia.

Every anti-American attack is met by a robust defence. Australians and Americans can be equally self-righteous. Every criticism exacts an explanation, an excuse, a rebuke, or a counter-attack. Every anti-American sentiment expressed by Australians has been expressed on countless occasions and just as adamantly by Americans themselves, whose self-loathing often knows no bounds. Whereas Americans suffer through the palpable complexities and contrarities of every American issue as it unfolds, most Australians only hear about the final outcomes. Nor do typical Australians grasp the ‘wholesale’ American belief in their God-given ‘exceptionalism’ – the somewhat xenophobic conceit that theirs is the greatest country on Earth whose ‘manifest destiny’ is to lead the world.

Much anti-Americanism chastises some amorphous, monolithic ‘America.’ There is no such entity. In reality, a few guards at Abu Ghraib prison brought an entire nation into disrepute. By the same token, no Australian critic speaks for all Australians, either about the United States or about the totality of some equally amorphous entity called Australia.

Hillary Clinton called anti-Americanism ‘shocking and unjustified.’ It has been branded as ‘insidious, negative, popular stereotyping.’ One Australian said it was now so ‘reflexibly’ knee-jerk a reaction in Australia as to be a ‘mental illness.’ Australians should consider, perhaps, how they would react if the rest of the world mounted a hostile smear campaign of anti-Australianism. Or are obsequious lapdogs excused from universal vilification?

Why is there no such ingrained animosity towards the British, Germans, Russians, French, or Chinese? Even the Catholics, Irish and Japanese are no longer panned. Many a wayward state escapes routine scrutiny and condemnation – even for harbouring tax havens, narcotics producers, people smugglers, polluters, environmental bandits, genocidal regimes, sex traffickers, slave traders, pirates, religious exterminators, terrorists, and brutal warlords. Instead, anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism are left to soak up the blame for most of Western humanity’s sins.

Detractors around the world are singing the same songs of protest. By routinely lambasting the same facets of American behaviour, are other nations simply trying to purge their own innermost anxieties? Dumping their guilt on the broad shoulders of the United States, they have found a convenient scapegoat whose media endlessly exposes its foibles and follies. As everybody’s sounding board, the United States thereby becomes the surrogate interrogation room for just about every crime on Earth.

What would the gentle, genial Les Heathcote have said about these dismal perceptions of the United States? Something sardonic, probably, followed by gales of optimism. Too late, alas. Les leaves unfilled a lamentable gap in our understanding of what Madeleine Albright called 'the indispensable country.'

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References. Rather than burden this journal with listing 350 references, readers wanting specific citations should contact the author directly (cincinnati@ozemail.com.au). Almost all incidents and persons mentioned can be located (and verified) on the Internet.